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ABSTRACT

In a plan to increase funding for California community colleges, Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis announced in February 1998 his intention to continue lowering fees, provide better teacher compensation, and strengthen relations between community colleges and the private sector. Davis intends to diminish student financial barriers to college by lowering or freezing tuition; in 1997 he sponsored the College Affordability Act, which cut per-unit costs from $13 to $12. He also plans to increase the number of full-time instructors and improve benefits for existing part-time teachers to promote a stable faculty capable of providing quality education. Finally, Davis will continue establishing relations between the business sector and community colleges, increasing placement opportunities for students entering the job market. Once funded, Davis' plan will improve, especially financially, the California community college system, which receives less government support than any other college system in the nation. (YKH)

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EDUCATION Government to improve school system with more opportunities

By Marisa Wong

Daily Bruin Contributor

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In a plan to increase funding for California community colleges, Lt. Gov. Gray Davis announced last week his intention to continue lowering fees, provide better teacher compensation, and strengthen relations between colleges and the private sector.

The Davis plan would hopefully improve the community college system, which has a high number of part-time faculty and spends $2,200 less than the national average on each community college student.

There are currently 1.45 million students, who attend 106 community college campuses. According to Davis, California's community colleges receive less government support than any other college system in the nation.

"The under-funding has cut on the backs of teachers," said Patrick McCallum, executive director of the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges. "If we are going to maintain a quality system where people have a strong education so they can transfer to a UC, then we

are going to need quality funding."

First, Davis intends to lower or freeze student tuition so that students are not prohibited from attending college because of high fees.

Last year Davis sponsored the College Affordability Act which cut per-unit costs at the community colleges from $13 to $12 and wants to assure students that these fees will not be raised any time soon.

"No student who meets the academic requirements of this system should be turned away for financial reasons," Davis said. "Allowing costs to prevent even some Californians from maximizing their full potential through a college education will ultimately impose staggering costs on all of us."

Next, Davis said he plans to increase the number of full-time instructors and improve benefits for existing part-time faculty.

Part-time workers do not currently receive any benefits and Davis aspires to provide these employees with such benefits as health insurance and paid office hours.

Whereas community college classes are often not available, cancelled or overcrowded, the Davis plan would hopefully promote a stable faculty that is able to provide quality education.

"We are not at the level we should be and there is clearly

a need for expansion," said Michael Bustamante, spokesperson for the Office of the Lieutenant Governor. "The only way to do it is to provide benefits. The importance of the contribution the faculty makes has been underscored."

Finally, Davis said he plans to continue establishing relations between the business sector and community colleges for those students who are interested in entering the job market after college.

There are currently five programs in the state where businesses from the private sector work with students in community colleges which provide preparation and training for entering the business force. Davis plans on adding to these.

"Every trade or profession imaginable is now affected by the technology revolution and every student must be equipped with the skills needed by employers," Davis said. "We must do more than just add more computers in the classroom. We must use the opportunities of the private sector partnerships to guarantee that our students are training for the real world."

Bustamante said that the general funding resource for Davis' plan has not yet been identified and that Davis just announced a blueprint for what he wants to see at the community-college level.

However, with the passage of the California Affordability Act, which also lowered fees at the University of

California and California State level and froze graduate program fees, Bustamante said they have hope for passing more legislation beneficial to higher education.

"Everywhere you look, people are talking about the need to invest in our community colleges," Davis said. "From the president of the United States to the leaders of business industry to workers displaced by downsizing - everyone agrees that community colleges have never been more important, or frankly, more neglected."